



# Shah Latif

Kalyan B. Advani

*Makers of  
Indian  
Literature*



The most celebrated and loved of Sindhi poets, Shah Latif ranks among the select band of the world's great poets who are honoured and cherished as the national poets *par excellence* of the language in which they wrote or composed. Shah Latif was a Sufi, a mystic of rare spiritual insight, and a poet of the soil who has made immortal in his verse the sights and sounds of his native land and the enchanting folk tales which are sung to this day in the villages of Sind and wherever Sindhis, of whatever class, nationality or religion, congregate.

Professor Kalyan B. Advani, the author of this monograph, is an acknowledged authority on Shah Latif. *His Shah Jo Rasalo Mujamal* won the Sahitya Akademi Award for Sindhi for 1968.

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SHAH LATIF



The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India. From Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.  
*Courtesy: National Museum, New Delhi.*



MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

# SHAH LATIF

*by*

Kalyan B. Advani



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## Contents

Preface	7
1. An Account of the Poet's Life	9
2. The Man and his Way of Life	27
3. Language, Technique and Treatment of Native Material	34
4. Ethics and Devotion	44
5. Love, Mysticism and Realisation	49
6. Trade, Commerce and Wealth	56
7. Art of Narration	61
8. Symbolism of Stories	64
Bibliography	71



## Preface

SHAH is the greatest and the most popular of Sind's Sufi poets. He ranks with the greatest poets of the world, whose names are permanently inscribed in the Chronicle of Time. He was a prophet and a seer and his verses are pearls of divine truth. His *Risalo* is a sacred work and a unique treasure in the Sindhi language.

Shah's saintly nature, his innate goodness and his singularly pure character and noble virtues have made him the idol of Sindhi hearts and touch all those who come in contact with his poetry.

I need not say here anything more about Shah Latif and his poetry than is incorporated in this modest volume. I, however, deem it an auspicious augury to quote here Rishi Dayaram Gidumal's glorious words in which he pays homage to our revered poet:

His was a genius  
Flowing like a crystal river  
Bright as light and clear as wind.

'He had that all "comprehensive tenderness", and that "all subtilizing intellect" which have made his verses the delight and the solace of the learned as well as of the ignorant, of the Hindu as well as of the Moslem. The great lyrist, Hafiz, has been styled the Petrarch of Persia, and Abdul Latif has been styled the Hafiz of Sind. But both Petrarch and Hafiz fail to give a correct idea of the poetry of their Sindhi counterpart. Abdul Latif has wedded the beautiful national legends with the most transcendental truths and has given them a purity and a lustre, a tenderness and a pathos, rarely equalled and never surpassed. He not only wrote melodious songs but he lived melodious days. His life was so holy and so pure that Plato would hardly have had the heart to exclude him from

that *Model Republic*, which had no place for charming and versatile poets! Abdul Latif was something more than a charming rhymers, he was a poet in the true sense of the word—a bright poet—a powerful poet—and above all a saintly poet.’

I am grateful to the Sahitya Akademi for sponsoring and entrusting this work to me. In this concise volume, I have tried to touch, however briefly, the essential features of Shah Latif’s life, philosophy and poetry. I have here confined myself to its defined scope and fervently hope that a more exhaustive study of the poet and his work will follow in not a very distant future.

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## 1. An Account of the Poet's Life

SHAH ABDUL LATIF BHITAI was born in 1102 A.H. (1689-90 A.D.) in the village of Halla Haveli in Hala Taluka in Hyderabad District. No vestige of this village is now visible except for the simple and solitary mosque, built on the site of the house of the Saint's birth by a Darvesh, named Laung, whose mortal remains now rest somewhere on the borders of Khairpur state. After the poet's birth, his father, Habib Shah, migrated from Haveli to Kotri, a village four miles from Bhit (the mound where the poet lived and prayed). The village now exists only in the form of stray ruins.

Shah was a Saiyid, descended from the family of the Holy Prophet. His ancestors hailed from Herat. An ancestor of his, Mir Hyder Shah, once chanced to come to Halla and there he married the daughter of one Shah Muhammad Hali.

Mir Haider had stayed in Hala for three years and eight months, when he received the news of his father's death and had therefore to repair for a time to his native place. Soon after his departure, his wife bore a son, who was named Mir Ali in accordance with the instructions left by him. Shah Abdul Karim, the great grandfather of the poet and himself a much revered mystic poet, was descended from Mir Ali. Shah's father Habib Allah Shah was the son of Saiyid Abdul Qudus Shah, son of Saiyid Jamal Shah, the third son of Shah Abdul Karim. Shah's mother was descended from Makhdoom Dayani, known as 'Makhdoom Arabi'. He was a 'majzoob', i.e., 'one afflicted by divine lunacy'. His tomb till today stands in the east of Old Halla.

Tradition relates that Shah Abdul Latif was born by the benediction of a certain holy man and so named in accordance with his desire. In *Tuhfat-ul-Kiram*, Shah Habib, the poet's father, is described as a 'Perfect Man of God', devoted to a life of piety and contemplation. At times, he used to be so completely lost in meditation as to be unconscious even of his beloved



son's presence in his chamber. *Tuhfat-ul-Kiram* was written by Mir Ali Kana' of Thatta, a disciple of Shah Abdul Latif, in 1181 A.H. (1767 A.D.), i.e., fifteen years after the Poet's departure from this world.

It is stated that Shah Habib sent his son for academic instruction to Akhoond Noor Mohammed Bhatti of the village Vai, a village situated six miles from Bhit and four miles from Udero Lal. Shah, it is said, declined to learn anything beyond 'Alif', the first letter of the alphabet, and also that of 'Allah', The Supreme One.

Learn the letter 'Alif', forsake all other learning ;  
Purify thy heart, how many pages shalt thou turn ?

When Shah Habib learnt that his son had declined to learn anything beyond the first letter, 'Alif', he felt elated and warmly embraced his son. He, however, remarked: 'Verily, thou art on the path of Truth. This mystic truth is also known to me but worldly prudence dictates that one should not abhor secular education.' *Tuhfat-ul-Kiram*, however, records that Shah did not receive any school education.

There are two opinions as to whether the poet was 'Ummi,' i.e., 'illiterate' or otherwise. The scholars, who regard him as 'the unique man of letters of his age', are, however, unable to produce any reliable or authentic evidence in support of their view. At best, theirs is an equivocal verdict. Dr Trumpp, the eminent European scholar, who was the first man to compile and publish the poet's *Risalo*, writes in the Introduction:

'It is said that he had never studied, which is however sufficiently refuted by his Diwan, where he exhibits a deep learning in Arabic and Persian.'

Dr Gurbuxani writes in his 'Muqqadama-Latifi' (Introduction in Sindhi to *Shah Jo Risalo*): 'It can be stated with certainty that Abdul Latif, according to his times, was highly learned in every branch of knowledge—partly due to his academic pursuits and partly due to his personal observation and study. He was a scholar of Persian and Arabic and had a complete mastery over his mother tongue. Not only this, but

he was also conversant, to some extent, with some other languages such as Balochi, Saraiki, Hindi, Punjabi, etc. . . . he seems to have made a deep study of the *Koran* and Traditions, Theology and Philosophy, Sufism and Vedantism, Syntax and Grammar, etc. The Holy *Koran*, Rumi's *Mathnawi*, and Shah Karim's *Risalo* were always with him. . . . he has touched in his *Risalo* a variety of subjects originating from the study of these three books and also of the aforementioned branches of learnings; at certain places he has given literal renderings of some of the verses of the *Koran* and Rumi's verses . . . this bears undisputable testimony to the fact that Shah Abdul Latif was a unique scholar of his own time. . . . the "true knowledge", however, which he imbibed, dawns only on a few rare souls. There is only one way of acquiring this knowledge—contemplation of the beauty and majesty of Man and Nature and reading the Book of Self. Undoubtedly, Shah had made this study and this is what accounts for his being the Sovereign of Poets.'

Mirza Kalich Beg writes in his work in Sindhi—*An Account of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai*: 'It is but certain that he received no instructions under any school teacher; perhaps what he learnt was by his own personal zeal. He was well versed in Persian and Arabic. There are several Koranic Verses, Traditions and other Arabic Sayings in his *Risalo*, which can be quoted with such elegant aptness by none except a man of deep learning. There is, however, nothing on record to testify that Shah had received any regular academic training. Had he learnt to scribe, a few remnants of his hand would have surely been on record. Shah possessed manuscripts of three books—the Holy *Koran*, Rumi's *Mathnawi* and the *Risalo* of Shah Karim of Bulri. Nothing is written in hand on the copies of these books—whether on their covers or in the margined space of their pages to exhibit any specimen of the hand of the poet. In all faith, we submit, that on Perfect Men, God bestows Divine Knowledge, of which mortals know nothing.'

Professor Jethmal Parsram in his *Life of Shah Bhitai* also expresses the belief that Shah had made a deep study of Arabic

and Persian. He (Professor Jethmal) refers to the wealth of Persian and Arabic phraseology contained in the *Risalo*.

Dr Sorley writes in his *Shah Abdul Latif of Bhit*: 'How far Shah Abdul Latif was an educated man has proved a great puzzle to scholars. The popular tradition is that he had no regular education but taught himself everything. Popular tradition in this respect is, however, unreliable. His poems show clearly an acquaintance with Arabic and Persian far beyond the ordinary accomplishments of his time. It is certain that he was familiar with the work of Jalaluddin Rumi... The mystical form of his poetry could never have been achieved without a deep and sympathetic understanding of the mystical development of Islam that came to India through the work of the great Persian poets. Thus, whatever the facts of Shah Abdul Latif's education may have been (and it is a typical conceit of hero worship to pretend that all knowledge came to him as a sort of special revelation), it is clear that his education was neither superficial nor contemptible.'

Mian Din Mohammed Wafa'i writes in his work in Sindhi, *Lutf-ul-Latif*: 'Such is the sublimity and grace of his poetry that none can believe that Shah Sahib was an illiterate man or an ordinary individual; but those who know that through self-purification and penance man gets knowledge of those mysteries of which common men are absolutely ignorant, will surely believe that God bestows upon some illiterate persons such treasures of knowledge as fill the minds of the wise and the learned with amazement.'

Saiyid Mir Ali Sher Kana Thattawi, a disciple and contemporary of Shah, however, writes in Persian in *Maqqalat-ul-Shuara*: 'Although the much revered Shah Sahib was illiterate, yet all the knowledge of the Universe was inscribed on the hidden tablet of his heart.'

Some of the foregoing scholars have laid stress on Shah's knowledge of Persian and Arabic and, on that basis, they pronounce the verdict that Shah had acquired scholastic training. In order to establish the truth of the thesis that Shah was educated, scholars invariably argue thus: Had he been



illiterate, he should never have retained with him a copy of Rumi's *Mathnawi*—a golden-lettered and golden-edged attractive manuscript presented to him by Mian Noor Mohammed Kalhoro, the ruler. Shah had a profound faith in Rumi, who is the only mystic poet of Persia quoted by him in his poetry. Sachal also was a disciple of Attar, the great Persian mystic poet of *Mantaq-ut-Tair* fame. Being an Awaisi, Shah probably had some pre-destined spiritual connection with Rumi (Awaisis receive spiritual Grace from living as well as departed Masters). It was, therefore, perhaps out of reverence for Rumi, that Shah had always with him a copy of the great Persian mystic's *Mathnawi*. Presumably Mian Noor Mohammed presented it to him in the light of his knowledge of the poet's faith in Rumi. Shah makes mention of no other poet in his *Risalo* except Rumi. He quotes him by way of authority in a string of half a dozen couplets, one of which may be cited here by way of illustration:

The whole diversity (creation) is His seeker and He  
the Fountain Source of Beauty—thus says Rumi.

The shaft of cupid did not spare even a man like Shah and when it pierced his heart, it rendered him a distracted wanderer in meadows and deserts like the ever-flying 'Huma' and the ever-roving musk-deer of Cathay. Like Majnun, he became a mad rover of the desert, singing pathetic songs of separation and indulging in lonely lamentations of love agony:

There was a wail in the desert as the note of a Koel,  
This distraction and tumult were verily of Love.

Shah was twenty when the shaft of love pierced his soul. Temporal love purified his being and elevated him to the heights of divine mysticism. He says:

O Mother! Love has purified me as the carder purifies  
cotton.

Mirza Moghal Beg, an aristocrat of the royal Arghun family and a resident of Kotri, was a disciple of Shah Habib, the poet's

father. Whenever a member of his family happened to fall ill, he used to entreat Shah Habib to sanctify his abode with a visit and confer the boon of health on the ailing member. The Mirzas observed strict pardah or veiled seclusion for their women. None but the Saiyids had the permission to cross the threshold of their Haveli (mansion). Once it so happened that Mirza Moghul's daughter fell ill and, as usual, Shah Habib was entreated to pay a visit to his disciple's house. Incidentally, Shah Habib himself was not well at the time and he therefore asked his illustrious son Shah Abdul Latif to represent him. The girl was carefully covered with a blanket ; but her beauty, like the full moon, could not remain as a veiled mystery. At her sight, Shah was overwhelmed with a mysterious ecstasy and holding her finger in his hand, he said almost in a state of trance: 'One, whose finger is clasped by the Saiyid's hand, shall witness no harm.' Hearing this, Mirza Moghul and his relatives were all red with wrath but they exercised restraint and discretion and said nothing to the son of their Spiritual Preceptor. However, by underhand methods they made it so hot for the poor Saiyids that the latter had perforce to quit Kotri and settle down some distance away towards the north in a separate Haveli (colony).

In the frenzy of love, Shah now began to wander through deserts and dales like Majnun. Once he was so overwhelmed by love's intoxication that he lost all consciousness and lay in that state at a place for three consecutive days. His body was wrapped with many a sandy fold, only an end of his skirt being slightly visible. By chance, a shepherd's eye fell on him and he conveyed the news to the pining Shah Sahib.

Hearing this, the poet's father flew to the spot, and addressing his son, said in an agonised tone:

Due to surging currents of wind, thy limbs lie buried in dust.

At this cry of agony, Shah recovered from his state of unconsciousness and responded thus:

I am still breathing in order to have a glimpse of the Beloved.

Their re-union, however, proved transitory, for one day Shah suddenly disappeared from his home in a mysterious way, leaving his parents once again in separation and sorrow. It seems, the poet, since that day, enjoyed for long the association of 'Sanyasis' and wandered with them through many a territory adjoining Sind. His *Risalo* contains references to Lakhpatt and Girmar, Jessalmir and Thar, Ganja and Haro, Lahut and Lamakan, Kabul and Hinglaj, etc. He travelled in their company for three years and enriched his spiritual experience.

In the company of Yogis, he not only made a pilgrimage to Hinglaj but also had a 'darshan' of Dwarka:

The naked ones (Yogis) went to Hinglaj ;  
The Shivites were sanctified by a visit to Dwarka.

The 'Devi' of Hinglaj is called 'Nani' by the muslim custodians of the Shrine of Hinglaj.

The *Risalo* shows that Shah went to Hinglaj via Ganja Hill in Hyderabad Sind. On Ganja Hill, he seems to have had some very revealing spiritual experiences ; he regards it (Ganja) as the very fountain source of Divine Grace:

Those who get acquainted with Ganja Hill:  
Become Yogis, forsaking all books and scriptures.

He saw Yogis' fire flickering at places where not a bird could set its foot.

Where not a bird's foot is perceptible, there flickers a flame ;  
Who will light fire there except wandering hermits ?

The yogic path is hard and thorny. Shah says:

'Alas! I have not been able to learn yoga. Yoga befits yogis who enshrine within them the mystery of all mysteries.'

It seems that at one stage Shah had to suffer separation of a Yogi friend. Either the friend had deliberately 'deserted' him or had departed to the Eternal Abode. In this state of separation, Shah, so to say, found himself in wilderness and shed tears of blood over his sad lot:



I find not today my Yogi friends in their abodes ;  
 I have shed tears all the night, troubled by the pang of parting ;  
 The Holy Ones for whom my heart yearneth, have all  
 disappeared.

In their abodes, I find not today any new straws and stones ;  
 Gone are they, leaving the ash to fly ;  
 They have embarked on their journey, blowing all the way  
 their conch.

According to some scholars, the above verses of Shah are a dedication to the martyr saint Shah Inayat Shah, who suffered martyrdom in 1133 A.H. (1720 A.D.), when Shah himself was only 31.

The difficult travels that the Poet undertook in the company of his Yogi friends, not only helped him in unravelling the intricate knots of the mind but also provided him with material for his love stories. His tales—Sasui and Punhu, Mumal and Rano, Suhui and Mehar, Nuri and Jam Tamachi, etc. all testify to his keen observation of scenes pertaining to Sind and its surrounding territory. While proceeding to Hinglaj, he commenced his journey from the Ganja Hill at Hyderabad Sind. The sight of the Helaya Hill and the Kinjhir Lake on the way inspired him to sing the glory of Nuri and Tamachi—embodiments of love and humility. The lake is situated at the bottom of the hill and on its sides there is a lovely forest growth. Of this beautiful spot, Shah sings thus:

The water runs below, the blossoms above and the lovely  
 forests stand on the sides ;  
 The fragrance of Tamachi saturates the atmosphere ;  
 With the blowing of the North breeze, the Kinjhir becomes  
 a cradle.

The vestiges of the ruined royal palace are visible even today on the Helaya Hill.

On his way to Karachi he saw Bhambhor, which reminded him of Sasui and her sufferings:

I shall not live for a moment in this vast city of Bhambhor ;  
 I shall seek and pursue my Beloved amidst mountains,  
 O Friends!

Thereafter he seems to have visited Malir, known for its 'hena'.

I shall dye my limbs in hena in Malir.

From Malir he went to Karachi, where he saw 'The Whirlpool of Kalachi', to the dangers of which he has alluded in 'Sur Ghatu'.

'There is deadly peril in Kalach ; he who enters it knows no return.' After leaving Karachi, he first came to River Hab and thereafter proceeded to the mountain Vindur and the rivulet of the same name ; thence to Haro mountain and finally to Hinglaj. On the banks of the Hab, he saw the white-footed deer, known as 'Rojh'.

While searching for her Beloved on the Hab, she (Sasui) saw 'Rojhes' at night.

The revenue office of Khariro is situated between the Hab and the Vindur, where tax is collected on behalf of the Ruler of Las Bella. Of this also there is mention in the *Risalo*. Shah alludes to the perils of journey to the Vindur thus:

They may well gird up their loins, who journey to Vindur ;  
Why should others do so if they will not stand the test?

After the Vindur comes the 'Desert of Guru and Chella', so called because once an ascetic and his disciple had perished in it for want of water. Surely none else but Sasui would embark on a journey through such pitiless barren tract.

Sasui may well hail wilderness for the Beloved's sake.

The journey across the Haro also seems to be full of tribulations and trials: .

I know not how they (Punhu and his companions) crossed the Haro range.

From Karachi to Hinglaj, it is an arduous, if not also a perilous journey of one hundred and twenty miles. Shah

seems also to have visited the territory of Kalat as is evident from his account of 'Jau, Jamur and Jar'—mountain ranges on that side and also of 'Van-Kar' in Las Bella.

Unscalable are the trees of Vankar, where exist Jau, Jamur and Jar.

After his pilgrimage of Sapar Sakhi, he seems to have returned to Karachi via Las Bella and thence to have visited Lahut:

The Yogis have set their foot in Lahut.

Sapar Sakhi has been one of the rulers of Las Bella ; he has achieved immortality on account of his unbounded munificence. Once he bestowed upon an ill-voiced minstrel a gift of a hundred horses of choicest Arab breed. Shah has immortalised this episode and the ruler in his 'Sur Prabhati':

Seek His Favour as but an ignoramus ;  
'Sapar' last night has set apart Arab horses as a gift for thee ;  
The Bella Ruler patronised one, who knew not even the rudiments of mystic.

During the course of his three years' wanderings in the company of Yogis, Shah accumulated vast spiritual treasures. Probably he was thereafter instructed by some ascetic to settle down at one place to contemplate divinity.

The Prince of the mountain Kingdom (Punhu) is not there, where you fancy him to be ;

Hark not to the rocks, your very Self is Vankar (His Abode) ;

Be away from aliens, inquire of the Beloved from Self.

Some scholars believe that Shah had to part with Yogis because of his unwillingness to perform some of their rites and ceremonies. The question then arises: 'Did the Yogis desert him or did he himself choose to bid good-bye to them?' Since it was not in Shah's nature to be on terms of disharmony with any one, one cannot imagine that he could ever have defied or openly disagreed with his hermit friends. In fact, he remained their most ardent admirer and adorer throughout his life.



On his way back from Hinglaj, he seems to have visited Moghulbhin, Lakhsat, Hallar, Porbandar, Jhunagadh, Girmar and Khambhat. At Thatta (Sind) he had discourses with a number of learned and pious men, including Makhdoom Mu'aayan also known as 'Makhdoom Taro'.

'Sur Samcondi', 'Sur Sri Rag', 'Sur Sorath' and 'Sur Khambhat' seem to be the fruit of his experiences during these travels. On his way back to his native soil, the poet seems to have visited Jessalmer and Thar. In 'Sur Marui' we have first-hand and authentic details of the flora and fauna of Thar and the life of its humble folk. It is probable that he also had the occasion to see Ludano Hill situated five miles from Jessalmer and the adjoining Kak stream, where Mumal had built a magic palace that had baffled and brought to a sorry end many a princely suitor. It was finally Rano who successfully survived its magic horrors and won her hand.

On his way back to Thatta, Shah happened to hear a piteous wail coming from a cave. On his going there, he found that a man was reciting in a mournful voice the following verse:

All alone shall I now pursue my Beloved (Punhu).

On his being questioned by the poet as to the cause of the woeful lament, the man told him that he was by profession a camel-driver (Jat) and that while passing by Bhit (Shah's abode) he had heard the verse from some Faqirs (Shah's disciples). Said the saint-poet to him, 'If you so desire, I shall recite to you the remaining two verses.' The camel-driver's face glowed with joy as Shah recited to him the second verse:

On the way are difficult mountain passes, the very cages  
of death,

On hearing the second verse, the camel-driver fell almost into a trance and entreated the poet to complete the couplet. Shah then recited the final verse:

If the Beloved's yearning is with me, I covet no other  
company.

No sooner did the poet utter the last syllable of the couplet than the camel-driver breathed his last. Shah's sorrow and amazement knew no bounds. Dr Gurbuxani writes in his above quoted Introduction: 'Then he buried him there and till today his grave is seen by those who chance to pass that way. Ever afterwards Shah used to say that a more sincere and a more profound lover than the camel-driver he had nowhere accosted in his life.'

Shah Habib, the poet's father, was, on account of his son's long absence, pining away in grief. He prayed to the Lord night and day for the safe return of his beloved son Abdul Latif. In this connection he also made daily supplications at the shrine of Makhdoom Nu'h. One day, all of a sudden, Shah quietly entered his parental abode. Once again Yaqoob (Jacob) got back his lost Yusif (Joseph) and the long period of painful separation terminated in a moment of immeasurable joy.

Soon after his return, he was wedded to the fair one, for whose sake he had for years wandered in hills and deserts, dales and mountains like Majnun—she was Bibi Sayedeh Begum, the daughter of Mirza Moghul Beg and later reverently called by Shah's disciples 'Taj-ul-Mukhadarat' ('The Glory of the veiled ones').

It was something of a miraculous nature that brought about this marriage. Once it so happened that some robbers of the 'Dal' tribe, taking advantage of the absence of the male members, broke into the house of Mirza Moghul Beg and decamped with all the valuables available. Sometime later, the Moghuls, along with their attendants, followed the robbers' track. On the way they happened to pass by Shah's house. Apprised of this, Shah volunteered his and his people's services; the offer, however, was contemptuously rejected. Shah felt very much grieved at this.

The Mirza was assassinated by the dacoits. This occurred in 1124 A.H. (1713 A.D.). The women folk of the Moghuls apologised to the Sayyids. Mirza Moghul Beg's daughter was married to Shah. She was a pious and virtuous lady. She

brought with her, her brother Golo, who did not survive for long. Shah left no issue. There was a conception but it was fruitless. It is said that Shah once saw from a distance one of his disciples running at top speed towards Bhit. He was almost breathless by the time he reached Bhit. He had brought a Pala fish from a long distance because the Bibi Sahibeh had expressed a desire to have it. On learning this, the Saint remarked: 'If the child yet unborn can make things so hard for my men, how much more trouble will it create when born? It is therefore better if there be no child at all.' Thereupon the child remained still-born. Shah always used to say that his children were his followers—their hearts like his were wounded with love.

The tenor of Shah's life now was smooth. He passed his days in prayer, in singing his poetic songs and in studying and admiring the beauty and grandeur of nature. The lovely natural scenes often filled his mind with ecstatic fervour, which resulted in poetry of the most glorious and divine character. He was always absorbed in deep contemplation, trying to study and understand the great mystery that is life and its relationship with divinity and universe.

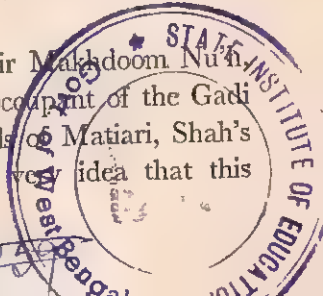
Shah's genial disposition and his piety attracted many souls to him. He was a Sayyid and also a man of ideal character and as such he commanded reverence bordering on worship. Shah himself was against this idolisation as is evident from the following verse:

O Yogi! adhere to yoga and keep away from Self-worship;  
Human discipleship is a cankerous disease, O glorious one!

But the people were spontaneously attracted towards him as iron is drawn to the magnet. The Pirs and Mirs (religious hierarchy and aristocracy) could not tolerate this. Of his antagonists, Dr Gurbuxani writes:

'Among them were the descendants of Pir Makhdoom Nuh, of whom Pir Panj Pak Tan was then the occupant of the Gadi or Masnad; then there were Ajnani Sayyids of Matiari, Shah's own relatives. They could not relish the very idea that this

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man should be a Pir (spiritual preceptor) and have such a large following. Again there was Noor Mohammed Kalhoro (1718-55), the ruler of the time and leader of the Kalhoras. The Kalhoras in those days were at the very pinnacle of their power and commanded both terrestrial and spiritual leadership.' It is now contended that Dr Gurbuxani's reference to Pir Panj Pak Tan is not correct.

All this jealousy and rivalry arose because of Shah's large following. Shah himself was averse to this but those whose vision was blurred could not see things clearly. All his adversaries vied with one another to trouble and pester him. Mian Noor Muhammed Kalhoro, the ruler, did his best to wipe him out of existence. None, however, by God's grace could do him any harm.

Those who are true servants of the Lord can be harmed by no tempestuous tide.

With a view to having Shah Karim's mausoleum built, Shah embarked on a journey to Multan, then well-known for flowery tiles. When, on his return, he reached Khudabad, throngs of people came to pay homage to him. Mian Noor Muhammad Kalhoro sent him a casket, containing a kind of costly confection. On receiving it, Shah cast it into the river, saying, 'Let the entire creation have the benefit of this rare and rich nourishment.' The confection was saturated with a deadly poison. On another occasion, the ruler invited him to his palace and, before parting with him, presented to him an impetuous mare of rare breed. Flinging aside the bridle, Shah spurred the animal to top speed and in an instant vanished from the people's view. After sometime, however, he returned to the spot quite safe and sound. Mian Noor Muhammad repented of his treacherous act with all his heart and immediately bowed to him in reverence and became his disciple. It is said that Ghulam Shah Kalhoro, the illustrious son of Noor Muhammad, was born as a result of Shah's blessings. Thus was Mian Noor Muhammad, his erstwhile enemy, rewarded by him with an illustrious son.

Shah could now no longer suffer to stay at Kotri because of his deep love of undisturbed solitude. During the course of his wanderings, he had sighted a mound of sand, shrouded in thorny bushes, near Kirar Lake, four miles from New Hala. In his view that was an ideal spot for meditative and contemplative purposes. With strenuous labour, he and a few followers of his transformed it into 'Bhit', the immortal spot, where the poet lived, prayed and now lies buried. He, along with some of his followers, plastered the sand mound with a coating of the famous Sind clay and built there a humble cottage for himself. He also built there a small 'Haveli' (abode) for his parents and assigned various portions to the Faqirs. He also built a small mosque there. During rainy season, 'Bhit' and its surroundings used to wear a beautiful garb of colour and perfume. In 'Sur Sarang', the poet makes an inspiring reference to it:

With tender affection, the flowers have poured on Bhit ;  
 The lightning shafts shine verily like violets ;  
 The pastures are now perfumed and luxuriously covered ;  
 Sarang (Rain) has filled Kirar Lake to overflowing  
 and florally decked the plains.

It is said that the poet's great grandfather Shah Abdul Karim of Bulri had once passed by that site (Bhit) and offered prayers there. He is said to have made this prediction: 'One of our descendants, who will be an illustrious saint, will make his abode here.' According to Dr Gurbuxani, Shah Karim was at that time on his way to Hala to meet his beloved friend Makhdoom Nu'h.

While Shah was still engaged in renovating Bhit, he received the news of his father's serious illness. Shah Habib (his father) sent him this message through a personal messenger:

What attachment has distracted thee from me ?  
 My beloved one! while I yet live, do, what thou shalt do  
 after I depart.

Shah's heart was deeply moved and he sent back the following message through the same messenger:

Grieve not, for I am not far away ;  
 Physically away, yet really I am one with your noble self.

Shah Habib felt very much consoled on receiving the message and soon thereafter expired peacefully. Unfortunately, Shah arrived too late to bid farewell to him.

Shah was deeply grieved at his father's death and remained in mourning for many a day. Shah Habib died in 1155 A.H.=1742 A.D. This date can be determined from the Arabic Chronogram inscribed by Muhammad Sadiq Naqshbandi:

Death is a bridge, crossing which a friend meets a friend.

Shah survived only for a decade after his father's death. After Shah Habib's departure from this world, the entire family shifted from Kotri to Bhit. Shah's reputation as a man of God now began to spread far and wide ; people now began to perform frequent pilgrimages to Bhit to pay homage to their beloved Saint.

He (Sami) perfumed the entire realm with his fragrance.

'Sama'a'—music of the mystic type—rendered, among others, by such eminent musicians as Atal and Chanchal, was Shah's spiritual pastime. Music was his life and soul. He himself had an expert knowledge of and a rare genius for music. Occasionally, he used to sing his own poetry. The 'Vai' or 'Kafi' that comes after the first Dastan of 'Sur Suhni' used to be constantly on his lips during the last days of his life. Thus begins the touching song:

By what account, shall I live without my Beloved ?

Towards the close of his life, the poet's heart yearned for a pilgrimage to Karbala. When he had but covered a little way from Wang Willasar, he was greeted by a pious man, who humbly submitted:

'O Revered One ! you have always been telling people that Bhit will be your burial place ; it is therefore surprising that you have chosen to embark on such a long journey towards the close of your journey on Earth !'



Deeply touched by the words, Shah abandoned the idea of proceeding further and immediately retraced his steps to Bhit. Arriving there, he donned black garments and sang 'Sur Kedaro' in lamentation of the Imams. He confined himself to solitude for a period of twenty days, during which he took only a few morsels of food. When he came out of his solitary chamber, he took bath, and then, throwing over himself a sheet, he sat in divine contemplation. Prior to this, he made a gesture, signifying that song and music be started. For three consecutive days, his Faqirs engaged themselves in song and music. When they stopped they discovered that Shah's soul had, without anyone's knowledge, flown to the Abode of Eternal Bliss. He left this earthly planet on the 14th of Safar in 1165 A.H.=1752 A.D. His life's journey ended when he was 63—the same age at which the Holy Prophet and Hazrat Ali ascended to the Realm of Eternal Light. He was succeeded by his nephew's son, Saiyid Jamal Shah, who had treated him with utmost affection and reverence during his brief stay in Wang Willasar (Kutch).

Shah's earthly remains, according to his own will, were laid at rest on Bhit at the feet of Mahmud Shah. Mian Ghullam Shah Kalhoru built a splendid tomb over his grave. The exquisite work was executed by Idan, the famous artist of the period and was completed in 1167 A.H.=1754 A.D. During the days of Mirs' supremacy, repairs of the saint's tomb and the mosque were undertaken on a grand scale by Mir Nasir Khan. His cousin, Mir Muhammad Khan, was responsible for providing the tomb with a beautiful silver door which, in its majestic solidity, stands as new as ever to this day. Several beautiful Persian couplets, indicating the date of Shah's death, are inscribed on the walls. Two of them, composed by Muhammad Panah, are very striking. Shah's tomb is now a place of pilgrimage for the high and the low, and to those who go there it offers much spiritual solace and comfort.

Those, who wake all night, to recite His Glorious Name ;  
Make their dust, says Abdul Latif, ever precious and  
honoured;  
Millions come to bend their heads to them.

Every Friday night Faqirs sing the choicest verses from the saint's poetry. The singing starts to the accompaniment of musical instruments at 10 p.m. and terminates at sunrise.

Shah never uttered his poetic words but in a state of trance ; his poetry was recorded immediately by his disciples. There is an erroneous belief in the minds of certain people that Shah had, prior to his death, consigned his *Risalo* to Kirar Lake, because he feared that the people would misunderstand and misinterpret his words and fall into error. There is a further belief that, at this, a wave of grief overwhelmed his followers ; and Shah, out of compassion, requested Mai Niamat (a lady by name Niamat) to dictate it to them. It is so believed that this lady had committed most of the poetry of Shah to her memory ; and that the new *Risalo*, so prepared, was named 'Ganj' and left in the custody of Tamar Faqir, whose descendants continue to guard it to this day.

It is inconceivable that a Mystic poet would destroy with his hand his own God-inspired utterances. Dr Gurbuxani puts it beautifully and aptly: 'A true poet ever sings Truth and Truth can neither die nor can it be annihilated.' Shah himself has referred to his verses as 'Sacred Utterances'—what is sacred can never perish. Whether the popular belief is valid or otherwise, the truth enshrined in his poetry remains with us and shall never die.

## 2. The Man and his Way of Life

THERE is no genuine portrait of Shah available anywhere but the pen-picture depicted by Dr Gurbuxani seems to be very near the truth. He writes in his 'Muqqadam-e-Latifi' ('Introduction to the *Risalo*'): 'It is said that Shah was not very tall but just above the medium stature. His shoulders were broad and he was neither very flabby nor very lean. His physical strength was good and all his life he remained healthy. In his youth, he had dark hair and a round and handsome beard. His skin was of wheat colour, slightly tending towards fairness. He had a broad forehead and black attractive eyes, which often shone like torch lights. His face was gloriously bright and in his old age particularly it reflected remarkable effulgence.'

Benevolence was largely writ on Shah's effulgent forehead and his eyes were always wet with the mist of divine tenderness. His poetry is a mirror of his character. He was the very embodiment of those qualities which he has commended in his poetry. His life's principle was to maintain humility and patience under all circumstances and to 'mould the mind like wax' and behave accordingly with all men. He saw in dust what he discovered nowhere in the entire universe.

What in dust is, in nothing else is.  
He discovered Eternal Life in self-annihilation.

Shah Sahib lived on simple and frugal diet and attired himself in a simple manner. He did not believe in self-decoration.

Those who are divinely intoxicated love no attire ;  
The Lahutis (Yogis), says Latif, are always poorly clad.

Shah used to wear a long yogic garment, stitched with black thread. His head dress was a white 'Kulah' (cap worn by Dervishes), wrapped all round with a piece of black cloth.



He used to take the yogic staff (Bera'gin) in his hand. He used to eat and drink in a Kishta or Kishkol (a boat-like bowl used by Faqirs). All these things have been preserved till this day at Bhit with devotional care and reverence. He often walked barefooted and only rarely used any footwear. He used to sleep on a wooden bedstead (called sandal), his bed being but an old and patched quilt. He slept but meagrely and lived a most austere life.

He was absolutely selfless and incurred no one's obligation. He never even asked any of his men to give him water, because that too, according to him, was like seeking somebody's favour.

It is said that a disciple of his used to come once annually to Bhit to pay homage to him. Every year he used to bring with him a humble woollen coverlet as a devotee's gift for the saint. Once it so happened that owing to poverty he was unable to purchase the usual gift for his Murshid and consequently abstained from his customary annual pilgrimage to Bhit. When next year he appeared before him, the Saint eagerly inquired: 'Why did you deprive me of the privilege of seeing you last year?' The poor man replied, 'Last year I could not afford to purchase a blanket for your sacred self; hence I felt ashamed to touch your feet empty-handed.' Thereupon Shah said, 'A blanket that separates a friend from a friend is of no worth or value.'

Shah was a very tender-hearted man. He had compassion and affection for all creatures—men, beasts, birds and insects. He hurt no creature in his life. He reminds huntsmen of the Great Hunter—Death—in order that they might desist from killing dumb creatures.

You yourself will be hunted by the Great Hunter—and you have engaged yourself in hunting!

His heart literally melted whenever he saw poor cranes in the hunter's snare. The poor cranes used to cry pitifully, not because they found themselves in prison but because the thought of their young ones woefully oppressed them:

The cranes are wailing, they are about to depart ;  
They have left their young ones behind—they lament on  
that account.

The piteous cries of the cranes literally cut his heart:

The crane's wail yesterday reminded me of my Beloved ;  
Without whom I am passing painful days here.

He was so soft-hearted that he nursed and brought up with his own hands two forlorn pups. One was called 'Moti' and the other 'Kheni'.

Shah was in love with music ; he breathed his last in a state of trance while listening to music. In the strings of the harp he heard the tune divine:

It is not the harp that sings, it is the very mystery of the  
soul that sings.

In 'Sur Sorath', he sings of the divine glory of music and of the immortality of the 'Song of Spirit'.

Shah's was a commanding personality and none dared ever show flippancy in his presence. There was always a quiet and impressive dignity about his demeanour. Occasionally, however, he used to regale himself with a few jokes at the expense of Wagand or Waru Faqir, whom he has immortalised in his 'Sur Bilawal'. In this 'Sur', he has used (out of affection of course), several humorous but uncomplimentary epithets in respect of this lame and untidy Faqir: viz. 'filthy', 'infernal fellow', 'sluggish creature', etc. This Faqir was an inhabitant of Kotri. It seems he was given to gluttony and had not even once in his life been a 'Knight of cleanliness'. Obviously, this inspired Shah to make some humorous remarks about Wagand in 'Sur Bilawal':

Once again Wagand, the sluggish fellow, has arrived from  
Kotri;  
Give him a taste of the rough stick of leafless Caperbush  
(Kirir).  
Once again Wagand, the Infernal creature, has come ;

The paradise (rosy company) of Sayyid renders even filthy  
 ones rosy;  
 Associate with perfume, so that thou shouldst become  
 fragrant.

Among Shah's chosen band of Faqirs the distinguished ones were: Tamar Faqir, his Chief Khalifa, whose descendants continue to this day to be 'Mujawirs' of the Saint's Shrine; Mahmud Shah, who had renounced worldly riches to become a Faqir—for him Shah entertained so much regard that he willed that he should be buried by his feet; Shah Inat, a big landlord; Mian Hashim Alawi Rehan Poto, a singer and one of Shah's amanuenses; and finally Balal, whom Shah loved so much that he sometimes used to visit his (Balal's) village to have the pleasure of his company.

Sind was blessed with a number of mystic saints during Shah's days and Shah himself used to visit them from time to time. As a young man, he had the privilege of meeting Shah Inayat, the great martyr saint of Sind. It is said that, on seeing him, Shah Inayat recited the following verse:

Slacken not thy pace, when confronted with difficult mountain  
 passes;

It is only materialistic beings, that retreat, shaken by the  
 arduous journey;

Go forth and garland the Beloved with flowers of Truth;

The Sweet Ones, says Inayat, will soon be by your side.

To this Shah replied:

O maid! slacken not thy pace in the face of difficult mountain  
 ranges;

Pursue and seek the Loved One in the precipitous rocks;

O Sasui! be vigilant before thou seekest Fire of Love;

Despair not of the loving tenderness of thy Worthy Lord;

He who is nearer to thee than thy very eyes, cannot be said  
 to be far from thee.

Shah had also gone to see Khwaja Muhammad Zaman Lawari personally at the latter's place, although the Lawari Saint was much younger to him in years. Shah was so much impressed by Khwaja Sahib's spiritual greatness that he always

used to recite the following couplet whenever there was mention of the Lawari saint in his presence:

I have seen, O Mother! those that have seen the Beloved;  
I have no words to sing their glory.

Shah Sahib also used to go to Thatta frequently to see Makhdoom Mu'aaiyan, one of the renowned saints of his time. In fact, it was at Shah's request, that the Makhdoom wrote *Awaisiya*, a book in connection with the Awaisi path. Shah himself was an Awaisi Faqir. An Awaisi is he who may or may not have a Spiritual Preceptor (Murshid). He owes his spiritual awakening directly to God. No one knows who Shah's Murshid was—perhaps it was entirely through his own ascetic exertions that he attained self-realisation.

It is mentioned in the *Tuhfa-tul-Kiram* that on the eve of Makhdoom Sahib's departure from this world, Shah one day said to his Faqirs, 'Let us go to have the last glimpse of our beloved friends.' On arriving there, the Faqirs started 'Sama'a' (mystic music), which so intensely touched the heart of the Thatta Dervesh that he immediately repaired to his inner apartment in a state of trance; and soon thereafter 'the bird of his soul flew to its Celestial Abode.'

Shah also had occasion to meet Mian Sahibdina, Sachal's grandfather, when the latter was hiding himself in a grove of mustard trees to keep himself away from the public eye. On seeing him, Shah said, 'Let not the Beloved be kept behind a Veil; let Him be brought out for universal view.' Thereupon, the hiding Dervesh came out of the grove. When next time Shah went to Daraz, he remarked, on seeing the child Sachal, 'The vessel that we have placed on fire will be uncovered by him.'

Makhdoom Din Muhammad of Sehwan is also reported to have been an intimate friend of Shah. Shah went to Sehwan a number of times to see his friend and they between themselves even once exchanged their turbans as a mark of their inviolable friendship and unshakeable love. Madan, a Hindu Sufi, was



another intimate friend of Shah Sahib. He also belonged to Kotri and Shah greatly adored his company.

A new event has lately come to light. When Shah was thirty, he went to Bukera village to have the privilege of seeing Qaim-ud-Din Qalandar, a mystic of exalted glory. He walked for two days to reach the village. He saw the saint of Bukera seated on a broken cot. He was greeted and treated by him with the utmost tenderness and cordiality. Said he to Shah, 'I can foresee a great spiritual future for you. Now stay here until the holy Ramzan is over.' Shah obeyed and remained in his company for the entire month of Ramzan. He became a true Awaisi by virtue of his association with this perfect man of God.

Whatever the mystic path pursued by him, it is manifest from his poetry that he was above all restrictions of caste, colour and creed. Shah was neither a Sunni nor a Shia. When once questioned as to whether he was a Shia or a Sunni, he replied, 'I am between the two.' When it was submitted to him that between Shias and Sunnis there was nothing, he replied, 'I am also nothing.'

If thou seekest the Beloved, discard all piety (religious consciousness);

Those who have seen the Beloved have abandoned all religions.

Although he was a sufi mystic in the real sense, he used to perform all religious duties faithfully, thereby serving as a model for his people.

As a perfect Guide, he defines the true path thus:

Understand thy religion and then pursue the spiritual path;

Tune thy heart to Truth and then enjoy the Abode of

Realisation;

Remain firm on the path and thus thou shalt be saved from all impurity.

It is evident from 'Sur Ramkali' that Shah had been blessed with the association of a perfect Yogi or a man of God, with whom he had some predestined connection. He seems to have

acquired 'grace' from him. He acknowledges this in unmistakably clear terms:

In this life we enjoyed a rare boon—the company of a Yogi; The one, with whom we had a spiritual tie, revealed himself to us.

He also records: 'The hermit cloak bestowed on me by my Guru is for me a priceless treasure. To every disciple or aspirant, he tenders this valuable advice: 'If thou wearest the garment given to thee by thy Guru in a spirit of self-annihilation, thou shalt truly attain thy destined goal':

The cloak given to me by my Guru is the richest boon for me ;  
O aspirant! Wear it with reverence, sitting in yogic posture.  
The cloak given to me by my Guru, is an ornament for me ;  
This shall take thee to thy goal, if thou wearest it with  
reverence.

Under the influence of Yogis, all sense of 'duality' vanished from his mind and his heart became free from all manner of rigid thinking and religious bigotry:

They are concerned neither with irreligion nor with Religion (Islam);  
They plead only thus: 'Make the Beloved your own'.

### 3. Language, Technique and Treatment of Native Material

SHAH, both as a man and as a poet, was a great patriot. He was no doubt a lover of humanity and his love knew no geographical frontiers. He was, however, an ardent worshipper of the soil of his birth—Sind—and also a great lover of India. His *Risalo* furnishes ample testimony to this—his very mysticism is interwoven with patriotic love and lore.

In an era, when Arabic and Persian commanded a position of supremacy in the world of letters, it was Shah who showed the wealth, vitality and poetic vigour of his mother tongue—Sindhi. The rich vocabulary of the *Risalo* is indeed a source of sheer wonder and a treasure of deep learning to scholars and literary men. It is true that his poetry embodies many words of Persian and Arabic stock but they serve as an ornamentation of an unobtrusive and happy nature. His language is very close to Prakrit—in fact it solves our present day controversial tangle in respect of language—it strikes a happy and harmonious balance between Sanskritical vocabulary on the one hand and Persian and Arabic phraseology on the other. An exhaustive list of words could be furnished in support of this thesis.

The most striking feature of Shah's poetry is this that both in technique and content, it is free from the tyranny of Persian models. He did not adopt Persian prosody for his poetic expression but he chose for it the 'Doha', the favourite model of India's saint poets. Thus he freed himself from a foreign and conventional technique. In his hands, the 'Doha' became a thing of matchless glory and superb charm; he introduced into it new varieties that gave it an attractive garb of its own. Here also he did not allow himself to be shackled by the rules of prescribed 'matras' or syllables and the rule of two lines. The 'matras' or syllables of his couplets present a variety that

lends an unrivalled sweetness and charm to his poetry. He did not confine himself to the rule of two lines but liberally widened its scope, in one verse embodying as many as eleven lines.

Shah's poetry is not only meant to be recited but also sung. The titles of some of his 'Surs' are based and conditioned by their import. Their subject matter is essentially of Sindhi character, the rest of the Surs are given titles according to the Indian system of music.

In his day, Shah was called 'Hafiz of Sind', not because his poetry has any affinity with that of the great Persian poet, but because his *Risalo* was as precious to his people as *Dewan-e-Hafiz* is to the Persians. Both were God-inspired poets. Shah infused into the Doha what Hafiz infused into the Ghazal—a burning intensity of feeling and poetic flight of rare excellence. Shah, however, loved Sindhi so much that he has not inserted any Persian quotation in any of his verses except in one in 'Sūr Suhni'. It is a singular hem-stich, not of any Persian poet but of the great mystic saint of Sind—Shah Inayat Shah of Jhok Sharif.

If my head be laid at the feet of the Beloved what does it matter!

Shah, however, has occasionally quoted verses from the Holy *Koran* and also Traditions but he has made their spiritual significance quite clear and explicit by his unique manner of poetic elucidation.

Shah's similes are drawn from the common and humble objects of his beloved province and embody a symbolic significance easily comprehended by his people. A few instances may be given here by way of illustration:

'The Ocean whirls as doth *curd* in a *pot*.'

'Sorrows have ascended to the top like *white ants*.'

'Like *creepers*, sorrows have entangled my heart.'

'She (Suhni) saw across the stream the hermit fire of her Beloved Mehar like an *earthen lamp*.'



'He (Tamachi) scattered pearls in the fishermen's abode like  
*shells and fish flakes.*'

'As a *blade of grass* shrieks when cut,  
So doth my heart bewail in separation of the Beloved.'

'As *ring within ring* doth the *hammersmith* mould,  
So hath my Beloved entangled my heart.'

'As *shrubs grow* on plains in rainy season ;  
So spring sorrows in my heart at the Beloved's separation.'

'They will sift sorrows from my body as *chaff from grain.*'

'My eyes rain like *April clouds* but make no cloudiness.'

'The hermit of the sunny hue emerged like the *moth.*'

'As the *oyster* sighs for clouds, so doth my (Marui's) heart  
pant for Malir (her native place).'

'As *salt to water*, so my heart to love.'

'Like the *neem twig*, they uprooted my heart.'

While illustrating his philosophy, Shah does not cite the names of any mystics of Persia and Arabia as other poets have done—except those of Rumi and Mansoor and that also only for a couple of times. He is in love with Indian Yogis. His love-mysticism is also confined to the folklore of Sind. His poetry is free from any allusions to such romantic legends as those of Laila and Majnun, Shirin and Farhad, so popular in the East—with poets as well as common men. His 'Surs' centre round the heroines, not heroes. Shah's heroines are what Majnun and Farhad are in the Persian works—a happy new departure from the common track.

Poets all over the world have given expression to patriotic feelings in glowing and glorious words. Shah's 'Sur Marui' embodies some of the noblest verses of this class. For him, even the dust of one's native land is more precious than the world's richest musk and to be buried in one's native soil is to achieve life immortal.

In his poetry, the spiritual guide plays the roles of the blacksmith, the butcher, the archer, the fisherman, the washerman, the dyer, etc., in turn, as the process of purification dictates. It is the function of a blacksmith to cast rusted iron into fire and then water it and beat it with an hammer to

harden it into shining and lustrous steel. Even so, the spiritual guide puts the aspirant to fiery ordeals and finally changes him into a shining spiritual hero:

Inquire of the Hammersmith's hut only by making your head  
the anvil.

The Beloved draws the lover by a bait even as the fisherman draws a fish from water ; the former's bait, however, is threadless and invisible but nonetheless irremovable.

The Beloved, having struck the bait in my throat,  
Declines ever afterwards to withdraw the same.

For Shah, the humble cattle-grazers of Thar, i.e. Marui's relatives are 'saintly souls', living in 'the all bright Malir'—'the Heavenly City, where their spiritual Highnesses dwells'.

Shah's 'Sur Kapaiti' is based on the symbolism of the spinner and the spinning wheel—man being the spinner and his heart the spinning wheel. Repetition of the Lord's Name is the thread spun.

Shah does not ignore Sind's lucrative professions in his search of illustrations—Sind jewellers and bankers had distinguished themselves in foreign lands in those days. Thus spiritual Masters are 'Bankers', who know true gold from false ; 'Jewellers' who, through their lenses, can distinguish genuine diamonds from false ones ; 'Lapidaries', who cut to shape precious gems and rubies ; 'Merchants', who sail on high seas to gather gold from 'Lanka' (Ceylon). Alas, the true 'bankers', 'lapidaries' and 'jewellers' are no more in this world ; and in their places we find charlatans enthroned. Shah laments thus:

Since bankers are gone, disappear thou also O Gold!  
Thy value none else can judge ; thou shalt be mingled with  
ore.

Those lapidaries are gone, who valued rubies and gems ;  
In their place the blacksmiths are now seen hammering  
rusty iron.

The camel and the boat act as a 'great stimulant of thought' for Shah. The human mind is compared by him with the camel, who turns to unpalatable and ugly shrubs even when it is fed on roses and decorated with silver and gold. But the camel in Sind as elsewhere has this virtue also that it can travel long and tedious distances with a huge burden on it ungrudgingly in hunger and thirst, in heat and cold. The human mind, if trained properly, will also conduct itself in a similar manner on the spiritual path.

I tied it to the bush to provide for it a feast of rose buds,  
The evil-natured camel feeds secretly on sour grass;  
Its ways, O Mother! have baffled me.

In 'Sur Sri Rag', Shah refers to the human body as a boat with multifarious holes in its bottom, tossed on tempestuous waves and harassed by violent and adverse winds. The 'True Captains' sound repeated notes of warning but rarely are they heeded by the careless Boatman. The great poet admonishes us thus:

Keep not vigilance out of thy mind whilst thou art on the ocean;

O Mariner! perhaps thou lovest sleep only to court disaster!  
Keep awake on the sea and negotiate thy boat safely to the shore!

Sind, in a way, is 'a paradise of birds'—the nightingale, the parrot, the peacock, the falcon, the duck, the crane, the Indian cuckoo, the coot, the partridge, the koel, the crow, the heron, the stork, the goose, the kite, the vulture, the sparrow, the pigeon, the jay and other domestic, desert and mountain fowls of endless variety. Their characteristics have been studied and cited metaphorically by Shah for moral, illustrative and spiritual purposes.

Thus, Sasui is depicted by Shah as hopping over trees like the peacock in search of Punhu, dressed as she was in a colourful and graceful garh. Her voice is as sweet and melodious as that of a parrot or a koel or a crane.

In Sindhi poetry, the crow is hailed as the messenger of the Beloved and many tempting offers are made to it by our poets to induce it to bring to them the happy news of a prospective union with the Beloved or to convey to him the lover's salutations and entreaties.

The 'Hans' or 'Swan', as found in Sanskrit poetry, is rather poetical than real. It is also represented as the vehicle of Brahman; nay, sometimes Brahman Himself. The word also is applied to an ascetic of a particular order. In 'Sur Karayal' of Shah, the 'Hans' or 'Hanj', as it is called in Sindhi, represents 'Man of God' or 'Man of Realisation'. The sea-gull and the crow represent ordinary men of the world, governed by gross thinking. The swan does not dwell in the midst of gulls or crows. It soars high in heaven and finds for itself a fountain of pure, limpid and serene water on some lofty mountain top. It dives deep and picks precious pebbles from the bottom. Yes, it soars high and dives deep—the distinguishing mark of a man of spirit. The crows and gulls sit on the bank of a dirty pond, looking for fish or carrion, even as men of the world look for things material, knowing not how to soar or dive. The world is a dirty pond, infested by gulls and crows. This is the symbolism propounded by Shah in 'Sur Karayal'.

Darting away from the cranes, the swan soared high,  
And discovered the spot, where dwells his Beloved.  
His eyes are cast into the fathomless deep;  
He hankers after the pearls, that lie in the bottom.

The world today is vitiated by hypocrites and charlatans, even as the limpid water of a stream or lake is polluted by dirty cranes and crows. Men of God, therefore, no longer wish to dwell in the vicious atmosphere of this false and wicked world.

The pure water has been polluted by crows,  
The swans are ashamed of repairing there.

Then the final admonition:

If you dwell but once with the virtuous swans,  
You will never again mingle with cranes.



'Karayal' is a synonym of the peacock. The 'peacock' in this 'Sur' stands for the spiritual guide or perfect master. The Peacock has its own knack of killing snakes, especially the cobra. The human mind is also venomous like the cobra and none can conquer it unless he has the support of a powerful spiritual guide. Alas, men of God are rare in these days, as says the Poet:

I looked eagerly and in vain for a peacock in Kinjhir Lake,  
The swans, whom I adore, have all flown away.

Shah confines himself to the birds and animals of his own beloved province of Sind. Taro (the desert cuckoo) thirsts for rain as the lover does for the beloved. Babio is a desert bird that dies when it is lashed by the hot wind blowing across the desert.

May I die like Babio by a blast of the hot wind,  
If ever I should forget my Beloved.

The poet illustrates the union of two souls, placed in different situations, by the example of the Bee and the Lotus. It is in this very 'Sur' that he cites this illustration:

The Lotus hath its roots in the earth, the Bee flies above ;  
Their romance is a clue to perfect love ;  
They drink and drink from the cup of love ;  
But they can never slake their thirst of love.

Again, the Bird and the Huntsman, remind him of the human heart and Satan:

That which is Bird, is also the Cage ;  
That which is Lake, is also the Swan ;  
The Huntsman dwells too within the Cage ;  
And has made miserable the life of the Swan.

Shah's 'Sur Dahar' is a pathetic tribute to the melody, sacrifice and tender love of cranes. They fly in flocks from their mountains abode in search of food, leaving their young ones behind:

They move in a flock, united in the bond of inviolable love,  
Behold! birds have more affection than men!

They assemble near a lake or a spring, and sing songs of tender affection. Alas! the dirty hunter all of a sudden emerges from his ambush and destroys their mirth—thus does death destroy the joy of loving hearts. As he takes some of them in his bag, they whine and wail for their young ones. The poet, whose heart is already cut on account of separation, feels a deeper cut when he sees a crane in this wretched state:

Yesterday, the crane, by its whines, reminded me of my  
Beloved,  
Without whom I am passing an empty life here.

Marui, the desert girl, who had been forcibly carried away by King Umar from the village well and confined by him to his palace at Amarkot on her refusal to marry him, says in 'Sur Marui':

As cranes pine for the rock,  
And oysters for the ocean,  
Even so do I thirst every moment  
For my beloved and sweet home.

In 'Sur Yaman Kalyan', Shah sings of the eternal love of the moth for the Candle or Flame and invites all lovers to the Feast of Fire:

If thou callest thyself a lover, retreat not at the sight of the  
flame;  
Enter into the Beloved's Effulgence and earn the bridal claim!  
Thou art still unbaked and knowest not the secret of the  
Oven.

An Oriental mystic says: 'On the Primal Day, I heard Divine Melody in the Voice of the harp.' Shah has immortalised this typically Sind instrument in his 'Sur Sorath', wherein the minstrel Bijal succeeds in inducing King Rai Diyach 'to yield up his head in willing sacrifice in sheer mystical abandonment'.

The Flute, the favourite instrument of Sind shepherds, laments because of its separation from its original home—the forest. Even so, the heart of the lover weeps because of his separation from the Beloved. Shah brings in the analogy of the Flute, when he refers to the piteous wailings of Sasui in the desert. In 'Sur Ma'azuri' he says:

The Flute wails and the half-slain woman indulges in cries of woe;

The former misses its leaves and the latter sheds tears for her Loved One.

In the 'Horn-pipe, blown by Yogis, the poet hears Divine Melody—'Anhad' or 'the Eternal sound within':

Their (Yogis) Horn-Pipe is mysterious and its melody shall annihilate me:

It is not like the pipe, blown by camel-drivers,

Nor is it like the harmonious sound of the bells, that made Suhni cross the stream;

Its melody is more excruciating than that of the Fiddle, that slew Diyach;

Such an instrument is neither in Sind nor in Hind ;

Those who have heard it, aver it is sweeter than the sweetest harmony;

They have been transported to the realm of ecstasy ;

It is acclaimed by the All-Glorious Himself ;

It surpasses in melody all musical instruments ;

The tinkling of bells charms flocks and herds, but this melody thrills human hearts;

O Friends ! says Abdul Latif (Shah), this one breathes life even into the dead.

Shah is seen in his most ecstatic mood in 'Sur Sarang', which he sang in celebration of the advent of rain, the richest blessing of Heaven to man. Rain was something of a wondrous marvel in Sind.

In Shah's 'Sur Sarang', 'Lightning' is symbolic of 'Divine Light' or 'His Universal Grace'.

Once again He hath devised a Universal plan—

Lightnings have shone in all directions and everywhere ;

Some have gone to Istanbul, some have advanced to the West ;  
Some have shone on China, some have bestowed a glance on  
Samarkandis;  
Some to Rome, some to Kabul, some to Kandhar have  
repaired;  
Some to Delhi, some to Deccan and some over Girmar have  
glittered;  
Some have moved to Jessalmer, some have lavished showers  
on Bikaner;  
Some have soaked Bhuj, some have glided to Dhat ;  
Some have come to shower rain on Amarkot ;  
O Lord! bless Sind with plenty and prosperity!  
O Beloved Friend! make the whole world happy and  
prosperous.

The divers or pearl-seekers alone can dive deep into the sea,  
covering their faces with a mask of glass. In mystical language,  
this mask signifies non-attachment.

Those who descended into the sea with a mask of glass over  
their faces;  
Discovered from the deep lustrous pearls ;  
They alone do see with their eyes such precious things.

The sea reminds the poet of 'the Ocean of Effulgence' wherein  
swim those who have the insatiable thirst of love. They are  
ever in the ocean and yet their thirst remains eternally  
unquenched.

Those who have drunk a sip from the ocean of beauty ;  
Suffer from a painful longing of incalculable measure ;  
Their thirst never abates although they are ever in the sea.

While he discovers a desert of thirst in the glimpse of the  
Beloved, he discovers in the barren desert of Thar glimpses of  
the golden city of Heaven—he refers to it as 'Malir', the native  
place of Marui. The celestial residents are by him called  
'Marus' (relatives of Marui) :

There are no restrictions there, nor any taxation ;  
Marus themselves are lustrous ones and their Malir is a  
shining place.



#### 4. Ethics and Devotion

THE basis of the poet's moral philosophy is humility. A man of humility is necessarily adorned with other virtues such as patience or fortitude, gratitude, sincerity, universal sympathy and love. All these qualities Shah had in perfect measure. There is nothing in Nature which did not appeal to him for its moral beauty. He discovered in dust the very ornament of his Soul—humility.

What exists in dust exists in nothing else.

Shah's principal and paramount moral teaching is this that one must hug humility under all circumstances and be guided by the dictates of the divine voice within—the voice of conscience. If a man at no time defies this heavenly Voice, he shall not be led into any moral error and shall thus be crowned with glory in heaven. He will leave this world with a sense of spiritual triumph.

With thy face buried between thy knees, pass thy days in meekness;

Let thy Inner Judge be enthroned; why implorest the worldly judge?

A proud man's company is to be shunned because it will impair your moral calibre:

Abandon all hypocritical talk; bury all sham!  
Avoid those that talk in terms of 'I' and 'We'.

Self-conceit destroys, but patience exalts an individual. The patient triumph while the conceited lose the day. Not by retaliation but by forbearance is Self conquered.

Hearing thy ill report, retaliate not;  
This is the precious counsel of the Spiritual Preceptor;

Those who annihilate their mind without a murmur, get all the glory.

Wrath is grief, forbearance is musk.

Shah was a great Karma Yogi. He did not believe in and did not commend any idle dependence on God (Tawakkul). It is man's duty to work and leave the fruit thereof to God. The troubles on the way may be heart-rending but they have to be faced with manly courage and philosophic endurance. It is only then that victory will kiss your feet. No sloth but honest and persistent labour will win the coveted prize.

The mountain awards no diamonds to lovers of inertia.

It is man's duty to face difficulties; the solution of his difficulties will be provided by Divine Agency. Human exertion is rewarded by celestial aid:

I shall partly swim and partly Thou shalt make me swim ;  
I shall partly strive and partly Thou shalt make me strive.

Success comes to those who move ; defeat dogs those who sit. There is no help for the inactive and there is no companionship for the slothful. To those who strive, the desert yields musk, the mountain rubies, the ocean pearls and the forest fruit. The world is a battlefield of action, where one has to fight like a hero, abandoning all manner of hesitancy and despair.

Shah also dwells on the code of honour to be observed by true warriors who have to fight for a cause, involving defence of one's honour and moral prestige. In his 'Sur Kedar,' sung by him in commemoration of the martyrdom of the Imams, he says:

A warrior who arms himself with a shield on the day of  
battle,  
Is attached to life and longs to live;  
He alone should call himself a warrior, who welcomes nothing  
but combat pure.

A true warrior's wife is always proud of her lord. In fact, the poet puts these words into the mouth of one such brave and noble lady:

Shouldst thou suffer blows in the face, I shall feel proud ;  
But if thou shouldst have any in the back, I shall hang down  
my head.

A warrior, who has fled from the battlefield and returned home to seek a coward's security is thus greeted by his heroic wife:

Thou hast fled and put me to disgrace, O Lord !  
Life is short but the slur is permanent.

He has a word of admonition for all—from the King to the hermit, from the warrior to the sailor. To the Sanyasis of false colour he says:

Those who think of garment or diet are far removed from  
God.

Why have ear-flaps bored, why not have the head (vanity)  
removed?

Have you decked your ears with yogic rings to lead an  
epicure's life?

Nature extends no patronage to the inactive. An indolent man should take a lesson from Nature. There is nothing in nature that is not active—the sun, the moon, the stars, the sea, the rivers and everything else in nature moves or works ceaselessly. Why should man, who is the crown of creation, become sluggish and thus fruitlessly waste his God-given energy ?

Neither the stars know any rest, nor rivers any tranquillity ;  
Thou welcomest that which comes to thee without any  
exertion!

How shalt thou amass spiritual wealth, if thou sleepest  
all night?

Man has brought with himself from Heaven priceless pearls and jewellery, every breath of his being a ruby of incomparable value. If he wastes this precious possession, he will come to

positive grief after his departure from this world—when he faces the Celestial Banker he will become ashamed of himself and his spiritual bankruptcy.

Thou hast squandered thousands and lakhs !  
And yet slumber lingers in thine eyes !

Man, the possessor of intrinsic gold and jewellery, deals in lead and glass here! Alas, how can one expect to realise musk if one deals in salt!

Thou dealest in salt and covetest musk !

He should deal in that imperishable commodity which is not diminished even by an iota though Eternity come!

Deal in that commodity which cannot wither with time ;  
Which, in the Celestial realm, will lose nothing of its lustre ;  
Have that treasure which may earn for you Eternal Bliss!

Man must imbibe the lesson of universal brotherhood from birds, who generally flock together under the sacred impulse of affection and love.

They flock together and never break the bond of love ;  
Behold! birds maintain a sweeter harmony than humans!

Even straws have a better sense of sympathy than human beings. The dry blades of grass standing on river banks can save a drowning man's life, if he has the knack of holding them in his grip at the fateful moment. If the straws be strong, they respond to his appeal for help ; if they be weak, they become uprooted and accompany him in the current! Could there be a better sense of sympathy and readiness to help someone in distress than this? Man must learn the lesson of fidelity from these humble straws.

Behold the obliging nature of these blades of grass !  
Either they fetch the drowning man to the bank or go with him floating in the stream!



Human life is a mere shadow—all pomp and grandeur must one day vanish. It is therefore incumbent on man to devote himself to the service of the Lord—to seek Him and be His true servant:

The earth that lies under our feet, covers the ashes of many  
sweet ones;  
We have seen with our eyes mighty heroes fall ;  
Life is so brief—awake and seek, says Latif.

Service of the Lord lies in self-purification and dedication of the heart to His Name. Shah's views on worship are these:

The body is a sanctuary, the mind a cloister—why resort to  
penance?  
Why dost thou not worship Him night and day ?  
Then shalt thou behold Him wherever thou turnest thy face.

For Shah, the whole world is one vast place of worship and every creature and object in the world a manifestation of divinity. In the pure realm of Bliss, there is no religious discord or disharmony.

There is no disharmony, where the Glorious Lord abides.  
The Beloved's face is the sacred arch and the world a  
Universal Sanctuary.  
Here intelligence and knowledge fly and vanish ;  
The Beautiful One is everywhere, where shall I go and  
prostrate!

Again:

For those whose knees form the sacred arch, their own body  
is a sanctuary;  
What account need they render, who are completely merged  
in Him!

## 5. Love, Mysticism and Realisation

SHAH, as is usual with oriental poets, is in love with love—that mysterious force, which, in the words of Rumi, makes even mountains dance. At the very mention of this pious impulse:

The mountain dances and becomes active.

Shah becomes ecstatic when he sings of love:

I cannot too profusely sing the praise of love ;  
I spell and read the very word with ecstatic fervour.

Again he says:

Neither yearning hath any end nor the pang of love ;  
Love hath no limit, it knows its own end.

Mysterious is the thirst of Love—a thirst which knows no satiation even if the entire ocean be quaffed:

I burn and roast and bake, I yearn and seek ;  
Within me there is Beloved's thirst, which I cannot slake ;

If I were to quaff the entire ocean, it will be but a sip for me. This thirst enhances with the quaffing of each draught—this thirst can only be extinguished by thirst!

Those whose self is filled with love have an eternal thirst ;  
Drink the cup of thirst, inflame thirst with thirst !  
O beloved! give me a draught of thirst so that I may quench thirst with thirst.

In other words the lover's thirst can only be satisfied when the Beloved has an equal thirst for him. Love is another name for martyrdom:

A single drop of Love's wine is beyond all value—Love means martyrdom.

One should learn the art of concealing one's love from the potter's kiln which, while burning, emits no vapour or smoke.

Love triumphs over countless dangers and perils—not even all the oceans of all the worlds can curb the ardour of a lover's heart. As love knows no limit, so union also is an event remoter than Eternity:

If I obtain union on the Resurrection Day, the Beloved may be deemed to be near;

But congratulations on the attainment of union are to be received beyond that date.

Shah is a poet of separation—he believes in the everlasting thirst of Love: 'What can be achieved through separation cannot be achieved through union,' he says. Separation keeps the thirst alive, union extinguishes it.

May I ever seek Thee but never find Thee !

May not Thy longing disappear from even a single hair on my body.

Come back O Separation! Union becomes a veil between me and the Beloved;

The moment my idol comes, the live wounds die.

If wounds die, yearning also dies.

Shah's Beloved has a beauty and an effulgence that transcend all beauties and effulgences of the Universe.

When the Beloved lifted with grace his intoxicated eye ;

The sun's rays became dim and the moon lost her lustre ;

The pleiades and planets bowed in submission to him ;

The Beloved's beauty rendered dim the lustre of gems.

When the Beloved walks, the earth kisses the path he treads ;  
and the Houris pay homage to him :

When the Beloved walks in his graceful manner,

The Earth kisses the path he treads and sings Lord's glory ;

The Houris stand in reverence, amazed at his beauty ;

By God ! the Beloved hath a more attractive charm than everything else.

The mystic poets of the East have often based their philosophy on the well-known Arabic saying: 'Worldly love is a bridge leading to Divine Love.' Shah's tales prove the truth of what is enshrined in this mystical utterance. In 'Sur Asa' he makes explicit what is implicit in his romantic stories. He applies the theory to himself—love was a great purifying force in his life.

Love carded my being as the carder doth cotton ;  
My hands abandoned all work, my limbs lost all vital  
strength.

It is in this very 'Sur' that he advises the aspirant not to see things with physical eyes, which mislead people into error.

Look not with these physical eyes, set in thy face ;  
None can ever have a glimpse of the Beloved by looking  
through these eyes;  
They alone enjoy His Glimpse that close these two.  
Have no earthly beloved, let not these black ones (eyes)  
move;  
Why not seekest the Divine Beloved !

It is in 'Sur Asa' that Shah reveals to us directly his real self. Here he wears no garb of a Mumal or a Sasui or a Lila or a Nuri but reveals himself without any symbolic cover as a seeker of Truth and man of realisation.

Truth has slain my heart into twain ;  
I cannot breathe even for a moment without the Beloved ;  
God and God alone reigns in my heart.

Being one with God, he had ascended in thought to that Pure Realm of Bliss, which is not conditioned by time, space and causation. This is a realm where the mortal senses of man cannot work—a land of indescribable wonderment, where neither 'Is' dwells nor 'Is Not'. It cannot be measured by any human scale nor can it be seen by mortal eyes. Human Intelligence has no scope to function there and Human Understanding becomes there but a blind and crippled wayfarer.



In this Realm of Wonder, Human Understanding can comprehend nothing;

A glimpse of the Beauty of the Divine Being cannot be enjoyed by this blind human vision.

Self is a Veil to Self—it is ego that constitutes a bar to Self-realisation :

O aspirant! Your ego is a Veil between thee and the Beloved ;  
Lo ! the Veil vanishes and then all doubts melt into nothing.

In 'Sur Asa', Shah talks of 'Pure Ego', which is the highest attainment of men of spirit. The false ego is the curse of man ; that leads to his fall and degradation. The 'Pure Ego' that comes from self-realisation is the greatest boon that could be conferred by Heaven on man—the very pinnacle of Divine Effulgence to which man is the inheritor. The utterance of this pure 'I' is the Voice of Divinity, of God Himself. This pure 'I' befits 'Divine Self'—the false 'I' or ego is vanity of vanities.

'I' springs from 'I', 'I' befits 'I',  
with the blessing of this 'I', become the real 'I'.

Only men of Truth need say this, you (common men) have not to say it. The man who attains self-realisation covets no worldly eulogy ; he is above all human laudation and applause. He is one with God, who alone deserves praise.

He renounces all laudation, he rises above praise ;  
Where there is Divine Presence, there none else has a separate identity ;

He (man of realisation) is immersed in those waters that know no limit of love.

Then his very body becomes a rosary and his mind the sacred bead ; and his heart becomes a harp, producing melody of divine harmony. His very veins sing the song of 'He is One without a second'. Such people may well sleep and pass no wakeful days and nights because their sleep is but super-conscious awakening.

Those whose body is a rosary and mind a bead and heart a harp;  
Whose very veins sing the song of 'He is One without a Second';  
Are awake while they sleep, for their very sleep is contemplation divine.

Like Kabir, Shah at the end of his spiritual quest enters the 'Limitless Realm' and there discovers that the Beloved's Beauty is beyond all measure of imagination.

I seek Him in the Limitless Realm and find that He transcends all limits;  
The Beloved's Beauty is beyond all reckoning;  
Here my yearning for Him is limitless and there the Beloved is all indifferent.

The false ego is a bar to real ego—Self-consciousness is a veil before Self-realisation. The moment consciousness of individual or separate identity dies, pure consciousness or self-awakening is born and then all worldly doubts and disturbances vanish like mist in the thin air.

Ego is a veil to Self, beware, O aspirant!  
The existence of this (ego) is a bar to union (with God).  
Ego is a Veil to Self, hear O aspirant!  
When the Veil is removed, all strife and turmoil cease.

Again:

We are those for whom we thirst;  
O doubt! depart! We have now realised the Beloved.  
We are those for whom we yearn,  
He is neither born nor doth give birth—dive into this truth!  
If thou shalt see aright, thou shalt call every creature God;  
O blind sceptic! doubt not this fact.

It is not the daily ritual prayer that leads a man to realise Truth—rather it will lead him to vanity, if he becomes too much conscious of his righteous conduct. A prayer that has a tinge of egoism in it, is not heard in Heaven and yields no spiritual good.

So long as thou art conscious of self, thy prayer is naught;  
Abandon all thought of self and then avow: 'God is Great!'

So long as thou art conscious of self, thy prostration is naught;  
Lose thy identity and then avow: 'God is Great!'

\* Shah strikes the final note:

He (God) is not separate from Self, Self is also not separate  
from Him;

'Man is My mystery and I am his'—know this truth;  
The knowers of Truth have all departed singing this tune.

Man apparently is a servant and the Lord is his Master—  
but where this love is, there is no distinction of Master and  
slave. The slave himself becomes the Lord of Glory through  
this alchemy. Then like his Master, he also becomes infinite  
and without any end:

The slave then hath no beginning or end;

Those who have realised the Beloved, are for ever merged in  
Him.

The slave becomes the Lord through self-annihilation and  
then there remains no distinction between the Real Being (God)  
and the portrait (man).

Self-annihilation exalts the slave to the pinnacle of glory;  
They (true seekers) are the Reality and also the portrait;  
The Mystery of the Beloved is beyond all power of words.

After speaking thus at the highest level of super-consciousness,  
Shah again descends to his usual realm of humble acknowledge-  
ment of self-limitation. After saying that he has been to the  
realm, where there is neither 'Is' nor 'Is Not', he says:

Where there is neither 'Is' nor 'Is not'—this is but an idea  
of a creature of clay;

The Beloved's Beauty is beyond all human ken.

Where there is neither 'Is' nor 'Is not'—this is but an idea  
of a creature of clay;

The Beloved's Pure Glory is beyond human vision.

Man, however exalted in spiritual glory, has his limitations; God is infinite and knows no limitation. The limited one cannot understand the limitless One. Even the greatest men of Spirit have not been able to split a single hair of Divine Mystery:

They departed from here as but disappointed ones and not  
as exalted ones;

Like a Sparrow, they took but a grain from the Harvest and  
were gone;

In this Valley, they were but as bubbles.



## 6. Trade, Commerce and Wealth

IN 'Sur Sri Rag' and 'Sur Samoondi', Shah refers to the commercial enterprise of Sindhi merchants, the commodities in which they dealt, the places with which they had commercial ties, the sea routes they followed in their ventures, the seasons during which they travelled and the various types of boats and vessels then utilised for commercial purposes. In several 'Surs' he makes a mention of some of the important ports and also of the stations where taxes were charged. We also get from some 'Surs' an idea of some of the land routes and the wares exchanged between Sind and other countries. The symbolism underlying these allusions is as obvious or implicit as fragrance is in the rose or as water is in the clouds.

In 'Sur Sri Rag', the poet makes mention of Porebandar, which indicates that Sind merchants had transactions by sea with some of the Indian ports on the Western coast. The perils of the Arabian Sea were no less serious than the hazards involved in commercial enterprises undertaken to far-flung harbours.

The boat of the frail ones is entrusted to Thy care,  
O Lord ! mayest Thou lead it safely to Porebandar.

Not only the ocean was tempestuous in itself—the tempests blowing over it added to its wrath and fury. It was lure of pearls that inspired Sind merchants to sail for far-off places like Aden and breast all manner of dangers with courage of the heart and faith in God. The lustre of gold attracted them to Ceylon and other far-flung realms.

By His Grace, they conquered tempests,  
Reciting His Glorious Name, they arrived in Aden.  
Ceylon gold has made sea voyagers restless;  
And all the time they yearn for Ceylon and Ceylon.

Sind merchants had specialised in the trade of precious stones, superfine fabrics and other costly commodities. They sailed in winter by sea and returned in spring by river. Their wives wept and pined in their separation and daily offered perfumed rice to the sea and floated earthen lamps on the river and prayed pathetically for their safe return. They used to hug the helms of ships before they lifted their anchors and parted with their lords with sobs and tears.

In the 'Surs' pertaining to Sasui, references have been made by the poet to the trade of perfumery between Sind and Kech from where Punhu (Sasui's lover) hailed. He had come to 'Bhambhor', Sasui's birth place, to sell perfume, which filled the air of the city with fragrance of a rare kind. They rode swift and comely camels, whose bodies were decorated with rich pearls and diamonds and artificial flowers of colourful designs. The difficult terrain between Makran and Sind, interspersed with deserts, forests and mountains, was such as to baffle even the camels of choicest breed. In the absence of railways, swift camels rendered valuable services both for transport and trade. The commodities imported or exported by land or sea were cloth, gold, jewellery, cardamoms, cloves, perfumery, flowery vessels, etc.

In several 'Surs', especially in 'Sur Mumal Rano', 'Sur Marui', 'Sur Lila Chanesar', 'Sur Kamod' and 'Sur Bilawal', Shah has thrown light on the wealth of Sind, luxurious life of its aristocratic families and munificence of its rulers. The way in which royal ladies adorned their persons and the way in which rulers lavishly lived and patronised humble men is amply illustrated in these 'Surs'. About the beauty and self-decoration of Mumal and her friends, the poet waxes eloquent:

As the roses, so their garments.

Their complexion is rosy and the shawls they wear are of green colour, so that they present the appearance of roses in their perfect form. They are human roses, emitting fragrance of musk and ambergris, embalmed as their bodies are with the perfume of the flowers of the most fragrant kind. Even

their cots and beds are perfumed with musk. Their ears and arms are adorned with ornaments of silver and gold—they look like idols of a perfect kind, adored and worshipped by princely suitors from far flung realms. Even the baths of Mumal's palace are perfumed; she and her friends so perfume their ringlets and persons that black bees swarm over them, labouring under the illusion that they are in a garden of rich oriental roses:

As roses, so their garments;  
 Their ringlets were dipped in oil of jasmine;  
 Their beauty stings the very heart of love;  
 The Sweet One's adornment creates mute astonishment.  
 Their shawls were as green as betel leaves;  
 They shampooed their limbs with *otto* and ambergris;  
 They besmeared their ringlets with sandal paste;  
 The ears of the Lovely One were decked with silver and gold.  
 The golden damsels played freely with silver;  
 Their chambers were filled with the fragrance of aloe;  
 And their cots with odour of musk;  
 Where the Fair Ones bathe with their heads covered with  
 sandal paste;  
 There black bees hover over the bathing water;  
 The Royal suitors shed tears of blood from their eyes—  
 So pierced was their heart by the shaft of Love.

What is said of Mumal and her friends reflects the luxurious life of aristocracy in Shah's days. The chambers of 'Kak Mahal'—Mumal's palace—were furnished with beautiful sleeping couches equipped with silken beds and velvety cushions and pillows. The palace garden was like spring in full bloom. All this reminds us of palaces and gardens of Moghul splendour—imitated to a certain extent by the aristocracy of Sind.

The story of 'Sur Lila Chanesar' is based upon a diamond necklace of fabulous price—an ornament possessed or coveted by every queen and princess. Also in this 'Sur' we land on allusions to some of the fashions then prevalent among aristocratic ladies—their ears were decked with golden rings and their necks with necklaces of intricate design; antimony enhanced the bewitching darkness of their eyes and oils of rare

varieties enriched the lustre and loveliness of their ringlets. In 'Sur Marui' we find references to several varieties of rich cloth—woollen shawls, the striped silken cloth known as 'Elachi'; cloths of rosy colours (Khuinba) and of blue colour (Abeer), the woollen cloth called 'Aram' and the well-known silken cloth 'Pata Cheer'. There is also a casual reference to 'Pulao' (a rich preparation of rice) and syrups—both being symbolic of aristocratic diet and beverages.

In 'Sur Kamod', 'Sur Prabhati' and 'Sur Bilawal', we have evidence (may be in an exaggerated form) of the enormity of the munificence and patronage of Sind monarchs.

Jam Tamachi, the ruler, falls in love with Nuri, a fisherman's daughter. In her eyes dwelt magic and in her heart 'humility of a wonderful nature'. After taking her into wedlock, he lavishes on her relatives and community members gifts in the form of precious stones and metals—pearls, diamonds, gold, silver, rubies, turquoises—he poured bottles of perfume on them and on the floor of their humble and stenchy cottages.

Sitting in the midst of fishermen, he put his hand in diamonds;  
 All stench vanished—he poured perfume on a lavish scale;  
 Costly gifts he distributed like ordinary fruit;  
 In the fishermen's huts, he scattered diamonds and pearls like  
 scales of fish;  
 Gems he gave and exhausted his store of rubies;  
 He sprinkled turquoises over the indigent folk;  
 There, says Abdul Latif, he threw away all his precious  
 stones.

Reference has already been made to the munificence of the ruler of Las Bella, Sapar Sakhi, who awarded a hundred horses of choicest Arab breed to a musician of poor talent for his sincerity and humility. He also speaks highly of the great Sama ruler of Sind—Jadam Jakhro—in terms of unparalleled encumium:

Where Jadam was created, there only that much clay was  
 available.



Again:

At the sight of Jadam, no other ruler occurs to the mind;  
When a spring is discovered, there is no need to dig any  
other wells.

But royal munificence, at its zenith, is symbolised in the act  
of Rai Diyach, who sacrificed his head in response to the  
mystic appeal of minstrel's (Bijal's) harp.

## 7. Art of Narration

SHAH has only touched the most significant episodes in the stories. He has portrayed the emotions and feelings of the heroines, describing at the same time in picturesque words the scenic background of every situation. While reading a story of Shah, we can visualise before our mind's eye the atmosphere or scenic background of a particular situation through the magic force of his language.

Shah himself plays the role of the heroine. The heroine speaks to us through the poet. Where there is a gap between one utterance of the heroine and the other the poet himself throws light on the situation or on the psychology of the heroine. Where there are two characters, as in 'Sur Sorath',—viz. Rai Diyach, the King, and Bijal, the minstrel—the poet acts as an interpreter.

In the final Dastan (Canto) of every 'Sur'—that is, at the end of every 'Sur'—he soars from the physical to the spiritual plane. Thus Mumal says at the end of 'Sur Mumal Rano':

Where shall I spur my camel? There is effulgence all round;  
Within me is rosy Kak and within me its orchards;  
All is Rano and Rano, none else hath existence.

Dialogue, portrayal of inner feelings, scenic description and characterisation are all present in his stories. An outstanding example in this respect is 'Sur Sorath', where the poet has concentrated his art on the conversation between the King and the minstrel.

Except the story of Tamachi and Nuri, as presented in 'Sur Kamod', all other stories in the *Risalo* are of tragic character, their chief theme being the heroic struggle of man against Destiny and the futility of such a struggle against inexorable Fate.

Shah's 'Sur Kedaro' testifies that the poet could also handle war poetry with consummate skill—in fact there was no branch

or type of poetry in which he did not excel. There is a ring of martial valour and heroism in his utterances in 'Sur Kedaro'. His similes bear the stamp of military skill though he had not actively participated in any military combat. He, however, lived in times of tribulation and trouble and had therefore an intimate knowledge of military feuds and strategy. Shah witnessed invasion by the much dreaded Nadir Shah. Hence his war poetry bears the stamp of verisimilitude, couched in a language of poetic loftiness and 'grandeur'. 'Sur Kedaro' can be styled as a 'Grand Elegy'. In 'Sur Kedaro' Shah has pathetically dealt with the theme of Imam Hussein's martyrdom on the battlefield of Karbala. The 'Sur', for its pathetic intensity, is unparalleled in Sindhi poetry. Although the main theme is Imam Hussein's martyrdom on the plain of Karbala, the poet has placed before men of true heroism, ideals of great and permanent value, and has depicted a vivid picture of ancient warfare and military valour:

O Prince of true valour! So long as thou art alive;  
 Drink deep from the cup of steel at the feast of arms!

Ancient warfare was a test of personal valour and heroism—warriors had to fight face to face and had therefore to exhibit not only courage of the highest type but also consummate skill in the handling of arms such as spears, axes, daggers, swords, maces, etc. Before the actual combat commenced, trumpets were blown and drums beaten to infuse added courage into the hearts of soldiers, who later fought with an almost reckless fury and fervour. The actual fight in ancient times was always preceded by the blowing of conches or trumpets, clarions or pipes and drums.

In the second and the third canto of Shah's 'Sur Kedaro' a true picture of the battlefield is depicted—a picture that forcefully and truly presents before our inside eye all that was associated with ancient warfare. A few verses may be quoted by way of illustration:

After the setting of the moon, the Brave Ones started on  
 their journey;

With them were drums, hatchets, javelins, poniards and  
ramrods;  
The brave met the brave, their swords clashed and crackled;  
They challenged and struck, piling dead upon dead;  
The fighters fell, their heads danced on earth,  
And the field resounded with great tumult.  
On that side the challenge, on this side the response;  
On both sides sounded clarions and trumpets;  
The soldiers and steeds were in wedlock united.  
They polish their axes and swords to save them from rust;  
The valorous ones never lift spears from their shoulders;  
The woosers of death are ever alert on the field.

The warriors rode not only horses but also elephants on the  
battlefield:

The elephants were hacked and there were streams of blood.

Noble ideals of heroism have been enunciated by Shah in  
this 'Sur'. A true warrior is he who fights in the name of God  
and does not in the slightest degree swerve from the field.  
'Life is brief but censure is permanent,' he says. A warrior  
may save his life by running away from the battlefield but he  
will earn for himself permanent ignominy. What is the use of  
saving one's life (which, after all, like the flight of a bird is  
so brief), when it is attended by everlasting disgrace?

Of women whose lords laid down their lives on the field—  
Each sings in sad but proud strain: 'O sisters! this hero has  
glorified his ancestors.'

## 8. Symbolism of Stories

SYMBOLISM is the very soul of Shah's poetry. There is no 'Sur' of his *Risalo*, whose fabric is not woven out of variegated threads of mystic symbolism. Shah's symbolism in his stories is of two kinds: Man's search for God and God's choice of a particular individual as His favourite. This two-fold symbolism is illustrated by a variety of beautiful similes, metaphors and allegories.

In Shah's love tales, the aspirant is represented as the heroine and God as the hero. The aspirant plays in turn the roles of Lila, Mumal, Suhni, Sasui, Nuri and Marui; and God plays the respective roles of Chanesar, Rano, Mehar, or Sahir, Punhu, Tamachi and Maru (Khetsen). The aspirant has two types of foes—internal and external. The mind and the world (with its temptations) are his two eternal enemies.

In the 'Surs', devoted to the trials and tribulations of Sasui, Shah shows that mountains, deserts, streams and forests do not constitute any barrier to the progress of the true aspirant. In other words, the true aspirant is not deterred by perils and calamities, however heart-rending they might be. Kech, the native place of Punhu, stands for the golden city laid in Heaven, the destination of the seekers of Truth. Mountains like 'Haro' and 'Pab', the river 'Hab' and the vast barren land lying on the way are all suggestive of the heart-wrecking troubles of the 'Path'. It is a lonely journey and the aspirant has to fight heroically and single-handed the dangers on the way. It is a journey, to be undertaken by the aspirant not only solitarily, but without any material or worldly encumbrances. Love, intense love, is his only companion:

The unburdened crossed Mount Haro,  
The burdened ones remained where they were.  
She who takes nothing with herself wins the Beloved;  
She who decks herself forfeits union.



In this journey, the aspirant should be armed with the dagger of 'La' *i.e.* non-possession and should assassinate his material desires with it.

Not with wealth, but with self-oblivion, she achieved the Beloved.

Shah has infused into Sasui all the longing of his Soul and the agony of his heart, devoting to her trials and tribulations no less than five 'Surs'. Other heroines have merited only one 'Sur' at his hands. 'Sasui' was a delicate creature, brought up in an atmosphere of luxury and comfort. She was the daughter of a rich washerman of Bhambhor. Punhu, the Prince of Kech, had come to Bhambhor in connection with a commercial enterprise. He fell in love with her and worked in disguise under her father as an ordinary assistant. He was subsequently carried away one night by his brothers on a camel while he was in deep sleep, the result of an orgy of wine drinking. When Sasui woke up in the morning, she found Punhu missing; and maddened by the loss of her lord, she renounced her home and undertook to cross difficult mountain passes and deserts to reach and win back the 'lustrous one'—her life, her soul, her everything.

'She had perhaps learnt the art of endless quest from the deer of Cathay and the Huma (Phoenix), which both know no rest,' says Shah in 'Sur Desi'. It is not possible for ordinary creatures to undergo the trials and tribulations of such a perilous journey. Men of God, like Sasui, achieve immortality by undergoing trials and sufferings for His sake and by dying as martyrs in the cause of Love. Ages pass but their names remain permanently inscribed in the Book of Life.

Born in a humble desert cottage, Marui is yet a lighthouse of truth and fidelity to the entire race of women. Says she to Umar:

Thy palaces have wrecked my heart, and their chambers  
have slain me—

Nay, it is the pain of parental separation that has devastated  
me more

Than thy palaces with their lofty balconies.

Again:

That which to you is Id, O Umar! is mourning for us;  
They (my parents) have abandoned all pleasure and  
purchases;

The Marus of Malir are martyrs to yearning for me.

King Umar had carried her away forcibly from the village well and imprisoned her in his palace at Amarkot. She spurned all offers for a life of luxury and comfort made to her by Umar. She refused to change even her tattered blanket of Thar wool, lest desert maids should accuse her of a breach of their moral code and feel eternally ashamed because of her conduct:

The simple girl is stitching and restitching her tattered blanket—So strong is her love;  
It is reduced to shreds, yet she is not tired of mending it;  
Lest people should say, 'Thou hast degraded desert maids'.

To her, privation in the company of her friends was better than the luxuries of the palace:

Hunger with friends is a luxury, privation with them a pleasure.

Shah's 'Sur Marui' contains some of the best and the most soul-stirring patriotic poetry in the world. Marui is the idol of all patriots. To her even the dust of her native land is musk or perfume of the rarest kind:

I regard the dust of my native land as musk.

She is prepared to brush the feet of her native messenger with her eye lashes and prays to Umar that after her demise her body be embalmed with the juice of the vines of Thar and buried under her native sand—and then even death will be a new life for her.

Should I perish here, thirsting for my native land;  
Build my grave, O Monarch! near my parental abode:

Embalm my remains with desert vines;  
Death will be a new lease of life for me should my body  
go to Malir.

Like Marui, Nuri is also of humble birth. She was born in a fisherman's cottage. Although Destiny ordained that she be born in the midst of humble folk, she was yet a pearl of a woman—an exquisite beauty, adorned with the ornament of humility. King Jam Tamachi fell in love with her at the very first sight and elevated her to the position of the Chief Queen.

As Tamachi loves Nuri for her humility, so God loves those who are humble and lowly.

There was not even a tinge of pride in the fisherwoman's  
mind;  
There was a tender delicacy in her eyes, that charmed  
the king;  
Of all the people, she captured the heart of the King with  
her gracious coyness.

The beauty of Mumal and her friends is beyond any scope of words and their self-adornment beggars all human language. They enhanced their charm with artistic and priceless ornaments and embalmed their persons with musk and ambergris. They were human roses with leaf-like green shawls over their heads and rapier-like glances in their saucy eyes. Mumal's eyes possessed axes that slew sovereigns, the testimony whereof was furnished by the concourse of graves standing on the banks of river Kak, flowing by her Kak Palace.

Of amorous charm, Mumal's eyes have axes,  
Wherewith she slays princes and kings;  
Behold scores of princely graves on the banks of Kak!

Her eyes cut across lovers' hearts as the fragment of a diamond  
cuts through a piece of glass:

In Mumal's eyes, there are diamonds of amorous magic;  
The hearts of all are cut by a single glance of her.

At last, Rana, with his astute intelligence, triumphs over the magic contrivances of Kak and wins her hand. Very soon, however, separation follows. Rana did not turn up one night in time and Mumal, through timid fear or a desire for solace, took her sister Sumal as her bed-partner. When, however, Rana arrived and saw Mumal in the embrace of another partner, he left agonised and quietly left the place, leaving his stick by her side. Thereafter, he kept away for ever from Mumal. Mumal, who had otherwise been haughty and ravishing, became a mere skeleton as a result of her constant pining away for Rana. She then became absolutely humble and renounced all worldly luxuries and pleasures.

O Rana! My eyes get fraught with tears at the sight of these chambers;

My bedsteads are now covered with dust and look lustreless;  
These palaces, rose-beds, bowers and musky gardens have all decayed without you.

Her narcissus-like eyes lost their lustre and became absolutely dry.

Agony hath dried my eyes, leaving no tears in them.

Mumal had to suffer life-long separation because of her error; even so, a man of God, if he falls even once into error, is rejected by Him for ever.

Like Mumal, Lila is also a royal lady of great charm and beauty. She is Chanesar's queen. Kauru, a princess in the guise of a maid-servant in her palace and a lover of Chanesar, tempts Lila to part with Chanesar for a night in her favour in exchange of a necklace of priceless diamonds. Lila succumbs to the tempting offer and loses Chanesar for ever. Chanesar, like Rana, is very sensitive and his sense of self-respect revolts when he comes to know about Lila's frivolity. He breaks with her; and then follows Lila's repentance and supplication.

I should throw the ornament into flames and cast the necklace into fire;

Should I have back my Lord, I should feel exalted even in an unadorned state.

Again :

Come, O Lord! that I may fling the ornament into fire in  
your presence.

He who, after once loving the Lord, runs after worldly things  
of shine and glitter, loses God's favour as Lila lost Chanesar's.  
Says Lila :

No fair one's coquetry will succeed with Chanesar;  
This have I realised that this is not a place for the  
exhibition of blandishments.

Verily:

This is the door where Lord's favourites are seen shedding  
tears.

Suhni was wedded to Dam but her heart was attached to  
Sahir or Mehar, a prince in the guise of a grazer of buffaloes,  
who subsequently became a hermit, sitting on the other side  
of a fierce and tortuous river. Suhni went to her lover every  
night, whatever the weather, swimming across the river on an  
earthen pot. Her sister-in-law, detecting this, once deluded her  
by replacing the baked pot with an unbaked one. It gave  
way and she was drowned. Thus she perished as a martyr  
to love. Her lover also jumped after her and thus both became  
united for ever in death.

Without Sahir, Suhni was an ailing creature; her medicine  
lay in Sahir's glimpse;  
She regained her health, the moment she saw the  
beloved one.

Suhni was undeterred by obstacles, however unsurmountable,  
for there was in her the impetuous surge of that mysterious  
ocean known as 'Love', which triumphs over a thousand  
illusory seas.

For those that thirst for the Beloved, the ocean becomes a  
mere pebble.



She would have died even otherwise but by dying in the cause of love she attained immortality. Even so, those who perish on the 'Path' achieve an undying name and fame. They live for ages—both here and there.

How else would she have been heard of, if she had not plunged herself into the deep?

She would have died even otherwise, but by thus dying she achieved life eternal.

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